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RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY 3213
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 4259
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 8935
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA PRIORITY 1829
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0555
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TAGS: [KPKO](#) [PBTS](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: WESTERN SAHARA: BASTAGLI URGES CONTINUATION OF CBMS

REF: RABAT 637 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Poloff Marcel Martinez for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During a June 16 meeting with the Ambassador, Special Representative for the Secretary General (SRSG) for Western Sahara Francesco Bastagli urged the Embassy to encourage Morocco to accept a revised list of scheduled flights to restart the suspended family visits program. Bastagli expressed concern that further wrangling over relatively small issues risked jettisoning the entire CBM program. Bastagli believed that Algeria and the Polisario are attempting to force out UN Personal Envoy Van Walsum by refusing to meet with him. He observed that the rhetoric between the two sides is particularly heated and said both sides are guilty of hyping the level of unrest in Tindouf and on the Moroccan side. Bastagli described CORCAS as a "Sahrawi face on a Moroccan institution." END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) SRSG for Western Sahara Francesco Bastagli met with Ambassador (their second meeting) for one hour on June 16. Bastagli was accompanied by MINURSO Civil Affairs Officer Claire Bamber, while DCM, Polcouns, and Poloff (notetaker) joined the Ambassador. Bastagli apologized for the relatively short notice for the meeting but wanted to seek USG assistance in getting the stalled family visits program back on track.

CBMs: Risk Of Indefinite Suspension

¶3. (C) Explaining that the family visit program had already lost three weeks of ground (NOTE: Flights have been canceled since June 2. END NOTE.), Bastagli noted his deep concern that if flights do not resume soon this current impasse will essentially put an end to the whole program. Bastagli wants to avoid this. Bastagli said the current suspension centers on the UNHCR list of scheduled flights, noting that both Morocco and the Polisario have shown him "official" UNHCR flight schedules that have different flight departure locations. Bastagli said "UNHCR needs to be more rigorous and firm," adding that the different schedules likely result from UNHCR personnel wanting to please both sides and not firmly following the guidelines for the CBM program. According to Bastagli, UNHCR Geneva (vice Morocco) has produced a revised list of flights (about one flight per week

from now until the end of the year) and has presented the compromise list to Morocco and the Polisario for review and approval. The Polisario June 15 signaled its acceptance, but Morocco, as of this meeting, had not contacted Bastagli regarding the revised list. (Note: in recent discussions with the GOM as noted reftels, GOM officials have indicated their continued support of the CBMs and claim that the Polisario bears responsibility for jeopardizing the program by altering previously agreed upon flight schedules.)

¶4. (C) Bastagli appealed to the Ambassador to encourage Morocco to accept the revised list of flights (COMMENT: Bastagli probably delivered June 16 a similar appeal to other concerned embassies in Rabat. END COMMENT.), reiterating his fear that if flights do not resume in the next few weeks the future of the program is in jeopardy. He hoped, however, that Morocco would approve the compromise list on its own volition. Acknowledging that Morocco and the Polisario have legitimate concerns, Bastagli argued that the GOM can voice its opinion in early July, when a UNHCR delegation is expected to conduct a thorough review of the family visit program, Bastagli disclosed. The program has enough funds available to conduct flights until the end of July, at which point there will be a donor appeal for \$2.2 million to carry the program (including non-political seminars) through the end of the year. Ambassador said the Embassy would see what it could do to help get the family visits program back on track.

¶5. (C) Bastagli also acknowledged that weak management of the CBMs has been a recurring problem, which he believed Geneva has also recognized. He was optimistic, however, that the situation might soon change with the arrival later this month of a new director in Laayoune. Coming to Morocco with lots of experience, Bastagli said he believes the new head of the family visits program, currently stationed in Somalia, will be more stringent in applying the rules. He also explained that UNHCR is adding a new position, which he viewed as positive. These two changes demonstrate that Geneva is committed to addressing this problem, he said.

Van Walsum Visit: Only If Something New

¶6. (C) Ambassador asked why Personal Envoy for Western Sahara Peter Van Walsum did not proceed with his scheduled trip to the region. Bastagli initially responded that Van Walsum canceled his trip because Algeria and the Polisario had not responded to his proposed program, but when pressed Bastagli confirmed that Algeria and the Polisario told Van Walsum that he should not make a trip to the region unless he has something new to bring beyond what was expressed in the latest UN reports on the Western Sahara. Ambassador noted that Algeria and the Polisario should have chosen to receive Van Walsum, even if only to provide him with an update. Bastagli agreed, and added that he felt this was an attempt by Algeria and the Polisario to "squeeze Van Walsum out," but he believed Van Walsum "may hang on." Algeria and the Polisario did not want to give the perception, by accepting the visit, that there is progress, Bastagli suggested.

¶7. (C) Bastagli also observed that the Polisario is feeling pressured both internally and externally. He said the Polisario senses that they need to "come up with something," which is creating tensions. He said that Algeria and the Polisario cannot continue being so "unproductive." Bastagli noted the "heated environment" of rhetoric on both sides, given the canceled Van Walsum visit and the UN Human Rights Commission visit. He said there was nothing to support GOM allegations of an uprising in Tindouf, adding that reports of an uprising on the Moroccan side are also exaggerated. Bastagli said there is undoubtedly unrest at a low level in Tindouf, which can mainly be attributed to traditional tribal tension, but "nothing too big." He did add, however, that in his view if "the other side" (Polisario) does not come up with something they run the risk of Sahrawis on the Moroccan side demanding a change in leadership because of Polisario inaction.

CORCAS and Autonomy: Endorse The Palace Line?

18. (C) Ambassador asked what local reaction CORCAS has received in Western Sahara. Bastagli responded that the way in which CORCAS selected its members was disappointing, and the organization is a "Sahrawi face on a Moroccan institution." Its president, Khali'henna, is seen as representing entrenched Moroccan interests in the Western Sahara; he does not represent a "new wave" of Sahrawi leaders. Bastagli said that CORCAS' role in the consultative process will probably end up much like the role the political parties have played, i.e. more process than substance. Bastagli said CORCAS's power, and its eventual autonomy plan, both emanate from the Palace.

19. (C) Bastagli said he was considering meeting with Khali'henna, but he was not sure it was a good idea to do so at this time. When asked by the Ambassador on possible roles that CORCAS might play, Bastagli replied that there may be an angle for CORCAS in identifying participants for CBMs, but the details would first have to be worked out. Ambassador noted a recent conversation he had with Spanish Ambassador to Morocco Planas (who recently met with Khali'henna). Ambassador Planas commented that his meeting with CORCAS had been somewhat disappointing, as CORCAS are clearly "servers and not cooks." Planas also noted that Khali'henna asked him if he was meeting with CORCAS just to follow in Ambassador Riley's footsteps. Planas also mentioned to Ambassador Riley that CORCAS headquarters in Rabat was at one time the residence of the Spanish DCM and is a suitable location to receive guests but does not appear to be set up as a working office.

Comment

10. (C) Our view at Embassy Rabat remains that the CBMs are a relatively low-cost way to promote engagement between the two sides, even as the larger political process remains stymied, and the humanitarian benefits of bringing together long-separated family members are in the USG interest. The Moroccans have clearly stated they are not responsible for the suspension of the program, whatever MINURSO's views on the matter. Nevertheless, it does appear that stronger and more savvy management of the program by UNHCR is vital to minimize manipulation by both sides and keep the CBMs on track, given the highly charged atmosphere. We appreciated the February visit to the Western Sahara by regional refugee coordinator and the endorsement of the program stemming from that visit. We may also wish to consider a joint donor visit to both sides of the berm to pinpoint and resolve outstanding management issues and raise the ante with the parties, in tandem with UNHCR's proposed program review in July. In any case, we believe the USG should do what it can to press the parties forward on CBMs without further delay.

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